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SUBJECT: RUSSIA: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SET FOR MARCH 2

SUMMARY

11. (U) A week before Russians head to the polls to vote in the State Duma elections, the Federation Council passed a resolution naming March 2, 2008 as the date of the presidential election. The unanimous decision by the upper house of parliament was expected and will become official when it is published within the next five days in Russia's state newspaper. The registration process for presidential candidates will follow closely on the heels of the Duma elections. More than half a dozen candidates have announced their intention to run for president; the potential pool of presidential candidates will be known by December 25. The process is weighted against independent candidates and those not backed by a party represented in the Duma. End summary.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION TO BE HELD MARCH 2

12. (U) Members of the Federation Council voted unanimously November 26, to set March 2, 2008 as the date of the presidential election. The timing of the election is governed by the law on presidential elections. Typically, the second Sunday of March is election day in Russia, which in 2008, would be March 9. However, under the law, there is a provision that permits the election to be moved up a week if the second Sunday in March follows a holiday. Since March 8 is International Women's Day, a holiday in Russia, March 2 will become the official date of the 2008 presidential election when the order is published in Russia's state newspaper, Rossiiskaya Gazeta. Publication must occur within five days of the Federation Council vote.

WHO CAN RUN FOR PRESIDENT?

13. (U) The parties that win seats in the upcoming State Duma elections (December 2) will be allowed to nominate presidential candidates without having to collect and submit signatures to the Central Election Commission (CEC). Parties that are not successful in the Duma elections are required to collect no fewer than two million signatures. No more than 50,000 of the total number of signatures can be from one subject (designated region) of the country. Signatures can come from Russians living abroad but that number cannot exceed 50,000. Supporters of self-nominated candidates can apply to the CEC for registration on their candidate's behalf. Any group of supporters must comprise no fewer than 500 members. These candidates also are required to submit no less than 2 million signatures. Unlike the State Duma elections, it is not possible to make a monetary deposit in lieu of collecting signatures. Presidential candidates must

be citizens who are 35 years or older and have continuously resided in the Russian Federation for no less than 10 years. Announced presidential candidates to date include: Garry Kasparov, Grigoriy Yavlinskiy, Gennadiy Zyuganov, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Nikolay Kuryanovich, Vladimir Bukovskiy, Mikhail Kasaynov and Boris Nemtsov.

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN TIMELINE

¶4. (U) Upon publication of the order establishing March 2, 2008 as the date of the election, self-nominated candidates have 20 days to submit documents announcing their intention to run for president, including a list of 500 members of the group supporting their candidacy. Within five days, the CEC will make its decision to register the group. Candidates nominated by a political party have 25 days within which representatives of the party must submit to the CEC their party congress's nominee and a list of the candidate's authorized representatives. Each registered party can nominate one candidate. Within five days, the CEC will make its decision to register representatives of the candidate (those people who are authorized to work on behalf of the candidate).

¶5. (U) Self-nominated candidates and the candidates of non-parliamentary political parties must collect and submit two million signatures of supporters to the CEC no earlier than 80 days before the election (December 12) and no later than 45 days before the election (January 16). Upon receipt of the signatures, the CEC has 10 days to verify the list. If more than five percent of signatures are found to be invalid, the candidate is ineligible to run. Candidates can challenge the CEC findings in court and the court must make its ruling

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within five days. If less than 2 candidates are registered to run for president, the election can be postponed for up to 60 days.

¶6. (U) According to CEC Chairman Churov, who attended the Federation Council session, the nomination process will be completed by December 25 and the registration process by January 16. The official campaign, during which candidates can actively campaign, including running advertising in the mass media, will take place February 2 - February 29, 2008.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) The system of presidential elections is such that it is difficult for independent candidates or candidates not supported by parliamentary political parties to be registered. The short deadline, the large number of signatures required and the strict and selective standard applied to verification of signatures are difficult barriers for all but the most organized and established candidates to overcome.

BURNS